

Dom Moraes Hails The Triumph Of The Human Spirit

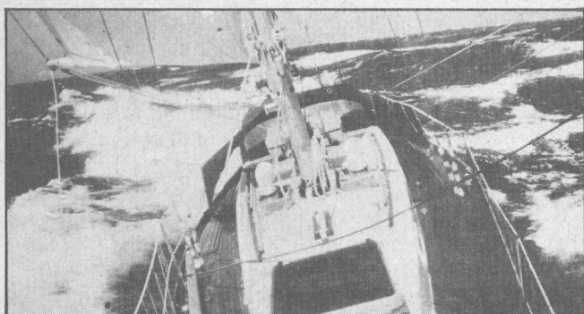
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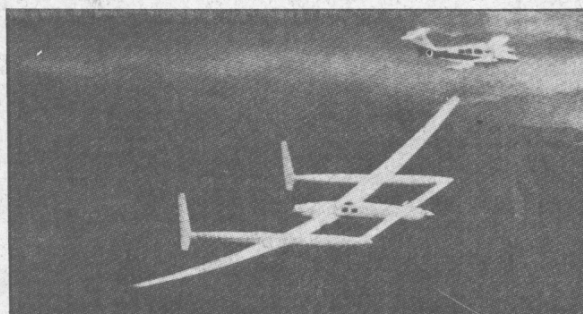


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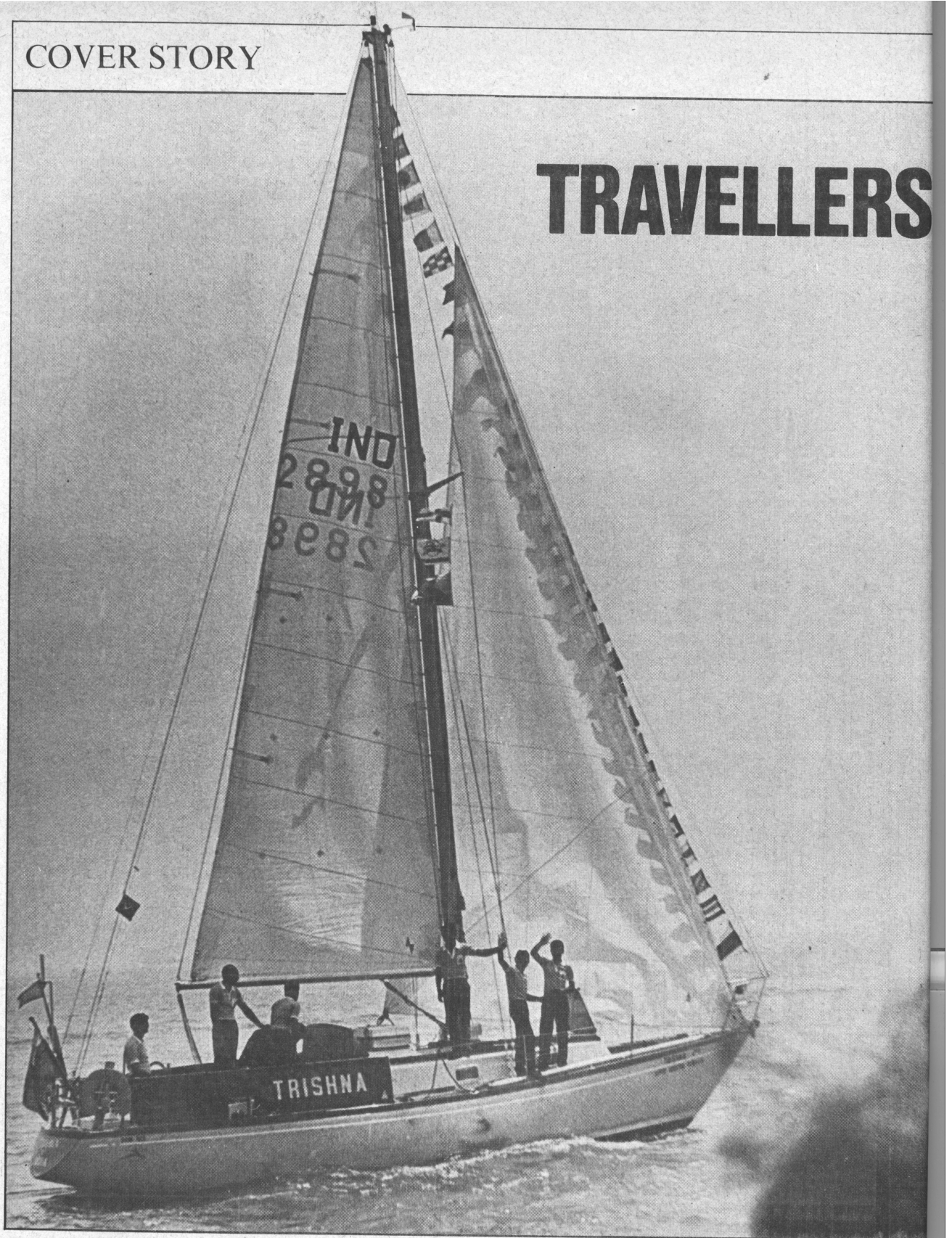
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COVER STORY

# TRAVELLERS



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PHOTOGRAPH BY PRADEEP CHANDRA

# ON TRISHNA

Soldiers at sea. Four went round the world in a 37-foot sloop. The other six went part of the way. **DOM MORAES** writes about their epic trip, which made Indian maritime history.



**THE TRISHNA TRAVELLERS** — Home are the soldiers, home from the sea: battered but not bothered, until they have to face the insistent cameras of the press.

**THEY ALL SEEM** cheerful men. They have seen and sustained much. Four of them have been around the world in a 37-foot sloop made mainly of fibreglass. The others have all travelled great distances in the same craft. I first met them at the United Services Club in Bombay, at a lunch hosted for them by the affable Secretary, Colonel Lobo. That was two days after they came home. The boat had then been travelling for 15 1/2 months. The voyagers had not all been at sea at the same time, some had indeed been on land for several months. Yet all of them had fully partaken in the adventure. Those who had come back to land early, organis-

ed details of the onward voyages and looked after the families of the others. They were united even in separation. The whole voyage was run like an Army mission, for these were all Army officers. The seniormost officer, Colonel Chowdhury, was 51, the youngest, Captain Ahuja, only 23.

At the lunch, I met most of them, though two were absent: Colonel Chowdhury, ill and in a Delhi hospital, and Major Mathur, whose mother was unwell in Jaipur. The rest were all, at one time or another, present, though some, because of the tight schedule, only came for a drink and left before lunch. Otherwise, in Army tradition, they kept their engagement.

The parents of some were there, the wives and children of others. I did not know any of them, and since the trip had been rather underpublicised until its triumphant conclusion, I couldn't tell who was who.

In the next few days I came to know these travellers fairly well, over the course of long talks with them, simply because they were so open and so friendly. Some even spoke to me of their personal problems. Some asked for advice on whether they should go on further long voyages or pursue their Army career. All were unfailingly cooperative. But then this was not in the miasmic air of Bombay. This was in Pune, the air was clear and crisp,

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at least by night, and the grounds of the College of Military Engineering, where they were all staying, and from which, originally, they had all come, were pleasant and conducive to conversation. At the USC lunch I talked at some length to Colonel Rao, who went the whole way and led the expedition. The Colonel is short, even slight, initially very shy, with a neat moustache. He may be a hero, but he doesn't look like one, which is preferable.

Rao said that the team was off to Pune that evening. I asked if I could come with them. "For these two days in Bombay," said Rao, "the Army gave us permission to talk to the press as much as we wanted. But from tomorrow there's no permission. So you'll have to talk to General Suri, who is in charge of us in Pune. But there shouldn't be any difficulty." Rao, who is 38, had been the moving spirit, or at least one of the moving spirits, behind the entire operation, which, in the usual manner in which human endeavour is treated in India, was delayed for seven years after it was first proposed. It was proposed in 1978. In 1984 they were able to buy *Trishna*, which was actually thirdhand, 17 years old, and then went under the name of *Guinevere Of Sussex*. Where Queen Guinevere came from is unascertainable — perhaps only King Arthur, who has been dead several hundred years, would know — but the boat was English.

One of my ideas when I first started to research this article was to attack the government for delaying the departure of the travellers for so long. A second idea was through a friend who said that numerous people had sailed round the world in small craft, that *Trishna* had made 31 stops, some of great length, and that there was nothing much for India to boast about. The third idea was that after the departure of *Trishna* from Bombay in September 1985, to her arrival there in January 1987, there was very little news of her progress in the Indian media, and there should have been more. The first two ideas, when I met

the crew (or crews) of *Trishna*, were destroyed at once. Firstly, the concept was so improbable that it wasn't surprising that its acceptance took so long. Secondly, it is mainly Westerners who have gone round the world in small craft. The only other Asian nation to have done so is Japan.

This is probably because of levels of technology. But what the *Trishna* proved was that Indians are capable of high levels of courage and spirit, which are different. Sailing 30,000 miles in 15 1/2 months in a 37-foot long loop, battered by 30-foot seas off the Cape of Good Hope and in the Tasman Sea, enduring dead calms where everyone was bored and put on weight, simply the strains of living in very close proximity with more than one other person at a time, must have taxed every member of the crew to his furthest mental and physical resources. Moreover, though they had some books, they had no films or music. This was because they had to conserve their electric supply. They had two litres of water, for all purposes, per man per day. If they came to a port, and bought eggs and bread, it would only last a few days. After that they ate cereals for breakfast. Lunch was always the same.

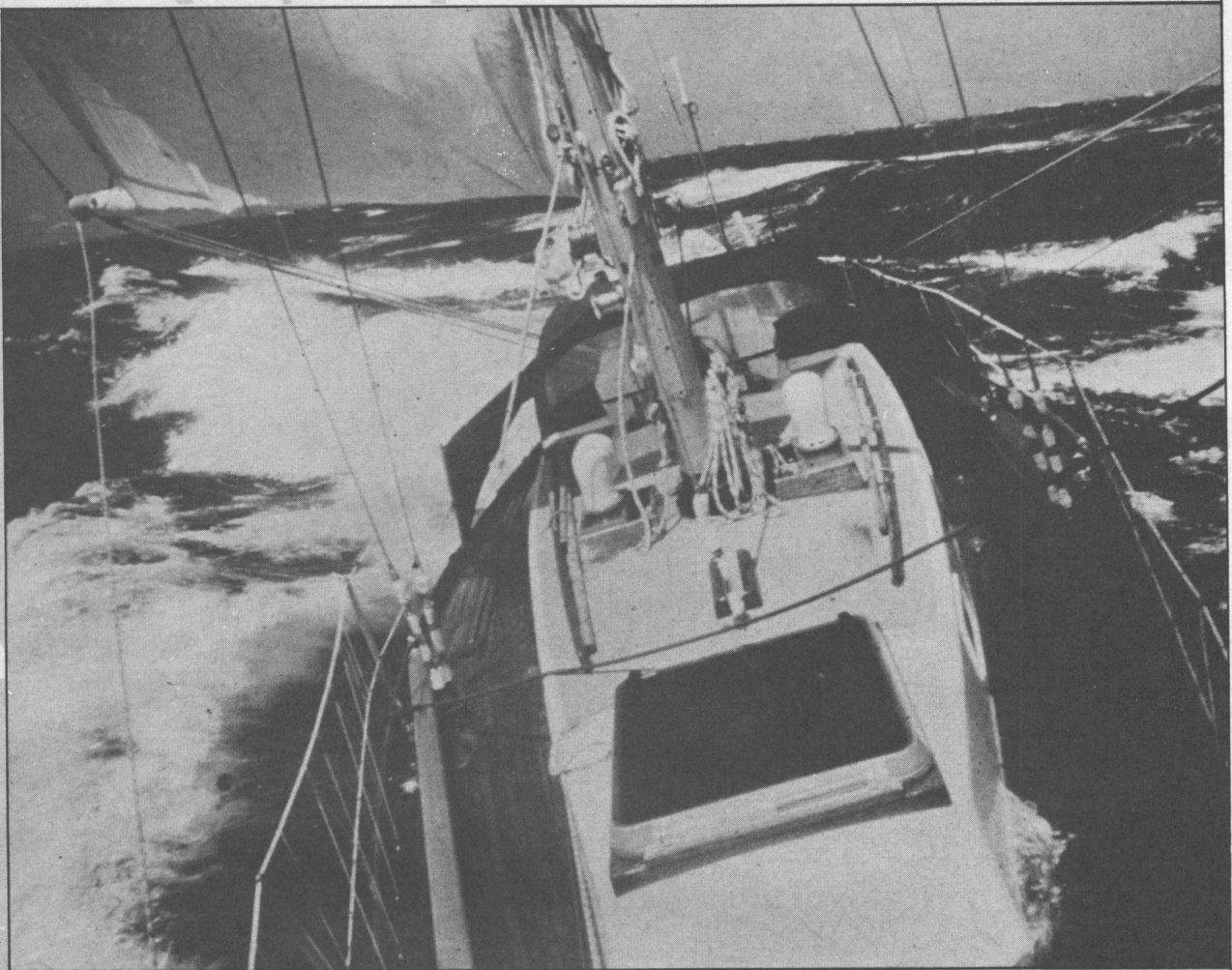
This consisted of what Colonel Rao described as 'a handful of noodles'. At dinner they ate rice, dal, and often fish, which they caught off trailing lines behind the boat. There was a shiny bait for all purposes, which was lost, and a red bait for tuna. The largest catch was a 25 pound tuna. Most of it was thrown away, because they had no refrigeration. For this reason they could not carry meat. None of them had inhibitions about food, but since they found all the tinned meat and fish unpalatable, they ate either fresh fish or vegetables with their rice. Major Bhattacharya, a tall, handsome man with a moustache, is a Bengali. "So," recalls Captain Shekhar, "he knows about fish. No sooner did we bring a fish out of the sea than it was frying. In rough weather nobody ate much. Tinned peaches were very popular then. One tin would feed six

people. Nobody was hungry."

Apart from this, the two smokers who were aboard at different times, Captain Bassi on the first leg between Bombay and Panama and Major Bhattacharya, who came on the last leg from New Zealand, suffered much. Anyone who smokes heavily knows that the habit dies hard. These two were each alone in their habit on the separate legs they sailed. The Captain and the Major, in the tiny cabin, could not smoke. They therefore went on deck to do so. If it was rough weather, with a high wind, it was hard to light a cigarette. Moreover they were supposed to blow the smoke downwind, which meant that they had to stand with very high winds hammering at them from behind, the ship tossing violently, and waves sweeping over already slippery decks. It may sound a minor difficulty, but this is a habit which, if you stop it suddenly, makes you exceptionally irritable.

However, they do not appear to have quarrelled seriously with any, or many, other people, nor did the non-smokers appear to have done so. "Of course there were some rows," Colonel Rao said in the eager voice that characterises him. "If you are all together in so confined a space, it's difficult to avoid them. But they weren't so much rows as disagreements. We had all known one another before, each of us knew what the others were like, their likings, and their temperaments. Usually the whole thing, if there was anything, was patched up in a day. Any disagreement there was usually happened in calm weather. In rough weather there was no time to think of anything except keeping the boat from sinking. In calm weather with a following wind, there was nothing to do, except let the boat sail. It was then that a few disagreements took place. It was also then that people got depressed and brooded about families and home."

There was also the fact that the crew lost all track of time. They kept watch for four hours. They slept for four hours. They performed whatever



*Nothing as they toil through calm seas. Headlines when the waves are high.*

their particular duties were (cooking, looking after the radio transmitters, the sails, the accounts, and so forth) for four hours more. They slept again, for four hours. They went back on watch. Four hours of this, and there was four hours more sleep. And this went on without cessation. Bhattacharya told me that it was much better aboard than on shore. "Now, at home," he said, "I wake up every four hours. I'll adjust, we'll adjust, but it's hard at this time." One could understand this. They also had family problems and their futures to adjust to. The family problems arose from their absences, the problems about the future from their presences: for they now, mostly, have to decide whether they make any more voyages

or try for higher Army rank.

The abandonment of the voyagers by the national media, for so many months, in view of all this, is hard to comprehend. After all the hoohah on their departure, after all the celebration on their arrival, one looks back at the completed trip and sees very little coverage in the middle. When the buoys were lost near Good Hope — where the boat, like the American airplane *Voyager*, (see story on page 20) tilted in turbulent waters to an angle of more than 70 degrees and nearly capsized — or when they were fighting high seas on the Tasman crossing, when their mainsails were ripped apart and they had to manually stitch them on deck with a hurricane behind them — was it all told to the

public? It wasn't. Why wasn't it? Because the Indian media consider nothing a success unless and until it succeeds.

But the news of gallant men in travail, soldiers on the high seas, would have made headlines in any other country. The fact that it was so passed over — while on the covers on the newspapers and on the technically defective television system, the news of killings in Punjab, in Assam, in Tripura, are daily displayed, price rises, strikes, and riots, are highlighted — is shameful and shocking. They may seem to be the main news but they are not. The main news in any country is surely what people achieve, not how they collapse. India is more collapsible at this point than at any other in its

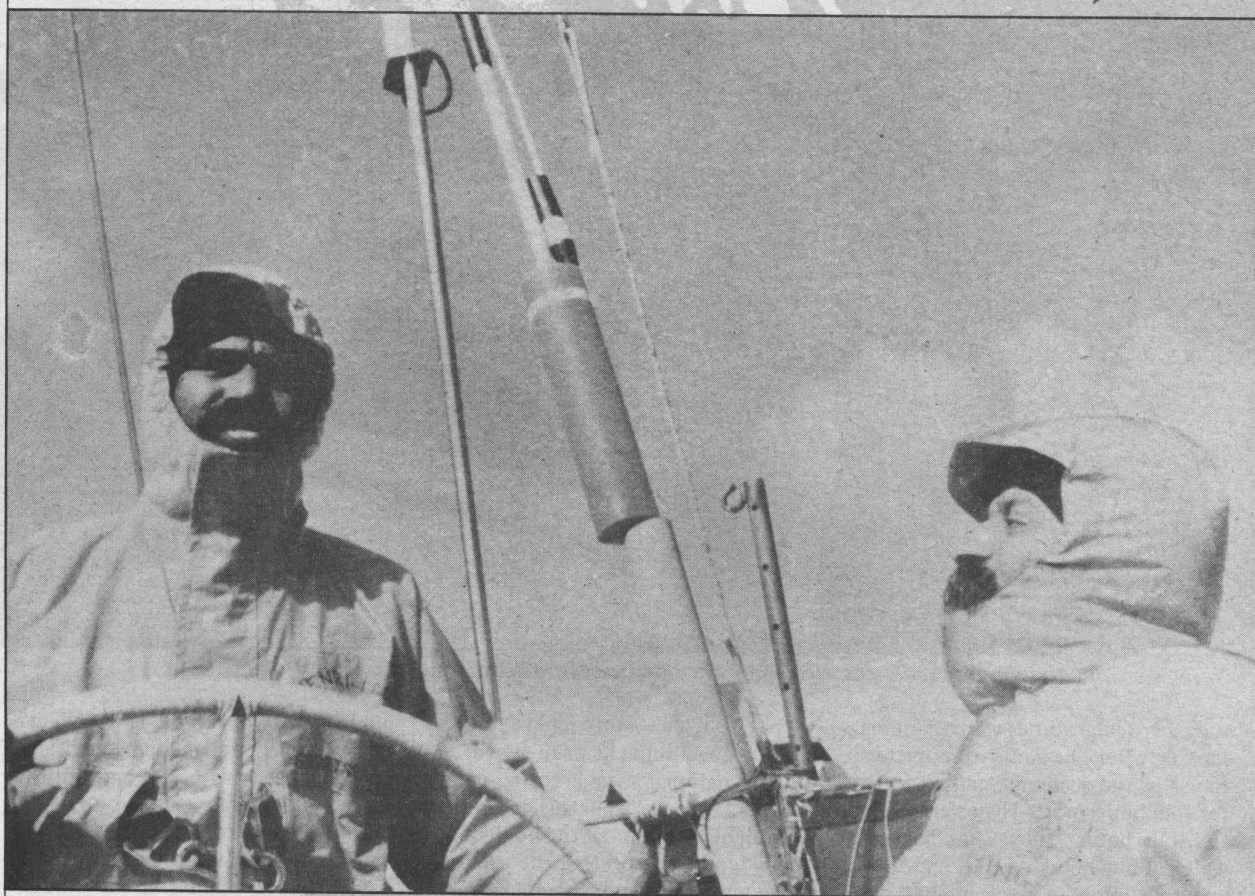
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history. The news of this is loudly and loosely sent out. During World War II, the BBC not only covered the war, but stories of blitz victims who, badly wounded, survived and helped others. Magazines and newspapers did the same. The public morale was uplifted by stories of some good coming out of much bad. But the publicity for the blitz victims went on and

changed. They will never, like the astronauts from America and Russia, or like the two person crew of *Voyager*, be the same again. Nobody has really examined why they wanted to go through this arduous experience, or why they wanted to be changed. Any ordinary person who actually wants to be changed must have some remarkable facet to him. Colonel Rao

*shna* people aren't killing machines, but real men.

**T**HESE PROFOUND reflections occurred to me while drowsing in a taxi in a seemingly endless night, as we drove across the Ghats to Pune. Lights flashed by the taxi, as from time to time they had floated by the *Trishna*: endless messages sent



Rao at the helm.

on. Now that the long trip is over, the focus of Indian publicity has drifted as far from *Trishna* as the wake once drifted from her bows.

The *Trishna* crew are not blitz victims, but men who have achieved something very special. They are also strong and confident people. Out of the endless trip, out of their hardships and the fact that they lived with one another for so long, their lives have

and other people said, as the American astronauts told me years before, that on this trip the travellers became convinced of the existence of God and the closeness of his presence. However unconvinced I may personally be about the validity of this remark, I know they have changed. I can see it in all of them. Our media publicises the killing machines called men, who operate all over the country. These *Tri-*

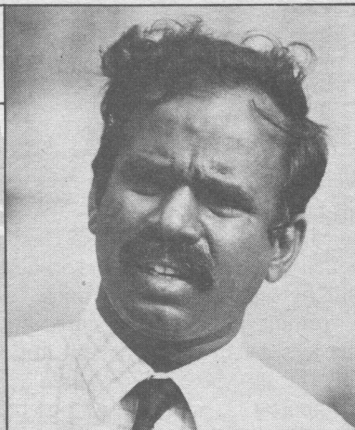
by men to men. At one point we were nearly collided into by a large truck. This was on a pinpoint bend at the top of the hills. Very many times, especially when they lost two buoys off South Africa, the *Trishna* was nearly in collision with huge oncoming ships. I was thinking of the voyage all the way into Pune. We fetched up at the railway station. Because of various calamities on the road, we

fetches up at 11 at night. We checked into a place called the Woodland, which at Rs 100 per night per person, is the cheapest and best approach to a five-star hotel I have encountered in India. It has one drawback.

This is that, apart from its 'varied sandwiches', as room service told me when I called at 11.30 pm, they served no food. Also the sandwiches were vegetarian. I rather like tomato sandwiches, also cucumber sandwiches. But they didn't have these, they had only cheese sandwiches and chutney sandwiches. We did order them, finally — and eat them. But later, as I tried to fall asleep and couldn't, I thought to myself, why was I grumbling about my own food when the people I was going to interview had been going over open sea under great hazard and under sail, which made it more hazardous, eating occasional eggs, rather continual fish, rice, and dal, and sometimes cereal and condensed milk? They had also had, most of the time, much physical exercise. 'A handful of noodles' for lunch? What was I complaining about?

At about 6 am I woke and phoned the College of Military Engineering (CME). I was feeling very hungry. I got an officer who said, "Yes?" I said, "Is Colonel Rao there? Are any of his people? Can I speak to them?" The officer said, "Who is Colonel Rao? Who are his people?" I said, "From *Trishna*." The officer replied, "Who is *Trishna*?" I answered, "It's not a person, it's a boat."

It was 11 am by the time we got Colonel Rao. He was apologetic, and once more, thinking of him and as it were, feeling him over the line, I lost all my anger and hunger, thinking of what he must have felt, and took off in a rush from the hotel to the CME. This is in a place called Dapodi, 10 miles from the centre of Pune. When we arrived there, Rao was looking very exhausted, but so were we. He said, "What do you want to do? Whatever we are to do, we will do." After a morning largely to do with bad connections on the phone, disasters with breakfast, and delays, I was amazed



## COLONEL RAO

*Trishna* was not an individual's idea. It was basically that of the Corps of Engineers, who have been promoting yachting in the country for some time now. We ventured offshore, cruising along

the coast, finally sailing deep into the sea in the sea bird class boat named *Albatross* from Madras to the Andaman Islands in 1970. We again sailed in *Albatross* from Bombay to Bandar Abbas (in Iran) in 1977. When we sailed back successfully, people asked us: "What next?" Various suggestions were put forward, *Trishna* being the most exciting one; the project was prepared by Major General H K Kapoor in 1979.

Anticipating that the government's sanction would come through by 1980, we asked for volunteers; a number of people came forward and a selection committee interviewed applicants for their professional and sailing backgrounds. A seven-member team was selected and we were trained by the Navy, in Cochin, on various aspects of sailing and survival at sea. Then, the sanction wasn't forthcoming — this cruise being the first of its kind, there were a lot of queries. The matter was finally discussed with the then chief of naval staff Admiral Dawson. At long last, the government sanction came through in 1984. Now arose the problem of locating the people selected earlier, who were committed elsewhere.

My interest in this project was akin to my interest in sailing as a hobby. So I read up a lot, felt very happy and excited at the prospect of such a voyage. I was nervous too — especially present in my mind was the fear of the unknown. Despite reading up and anticipating all the dangers that one would face, the fear of the unknown was still a predominant one. That was where God came in, I think. I just left it all to Him.

We faced great risks and we had to do it all alone — though we could have called in port in case of something going wrong, we didn't want to involve others. Then again, we had to steer clear away from South Africa — as we had no sanction to enter their territory. We also faced problems of high velocity winds and waves which lashed our boat. We had very rough seas till we rounded the Cape of Good Hope also called the Cape of Storms.

Whales were another problem. I had seen small ones while sailing from England to Bombay, but in the South Atlantic, just before we reached St Helena, while the watch was changing, A K Singh shouted that he'd spotted a whale. We sailed a little further and saw the huge thing diving towards us. Now, in such a situation, there was absolutely nothing I could have done. The fin alone was 20 feet long and the whale must have been at least 40 feet, much bigger than our boat. If it had come up diving south east, under us, that would have been the end of *Trishna*.

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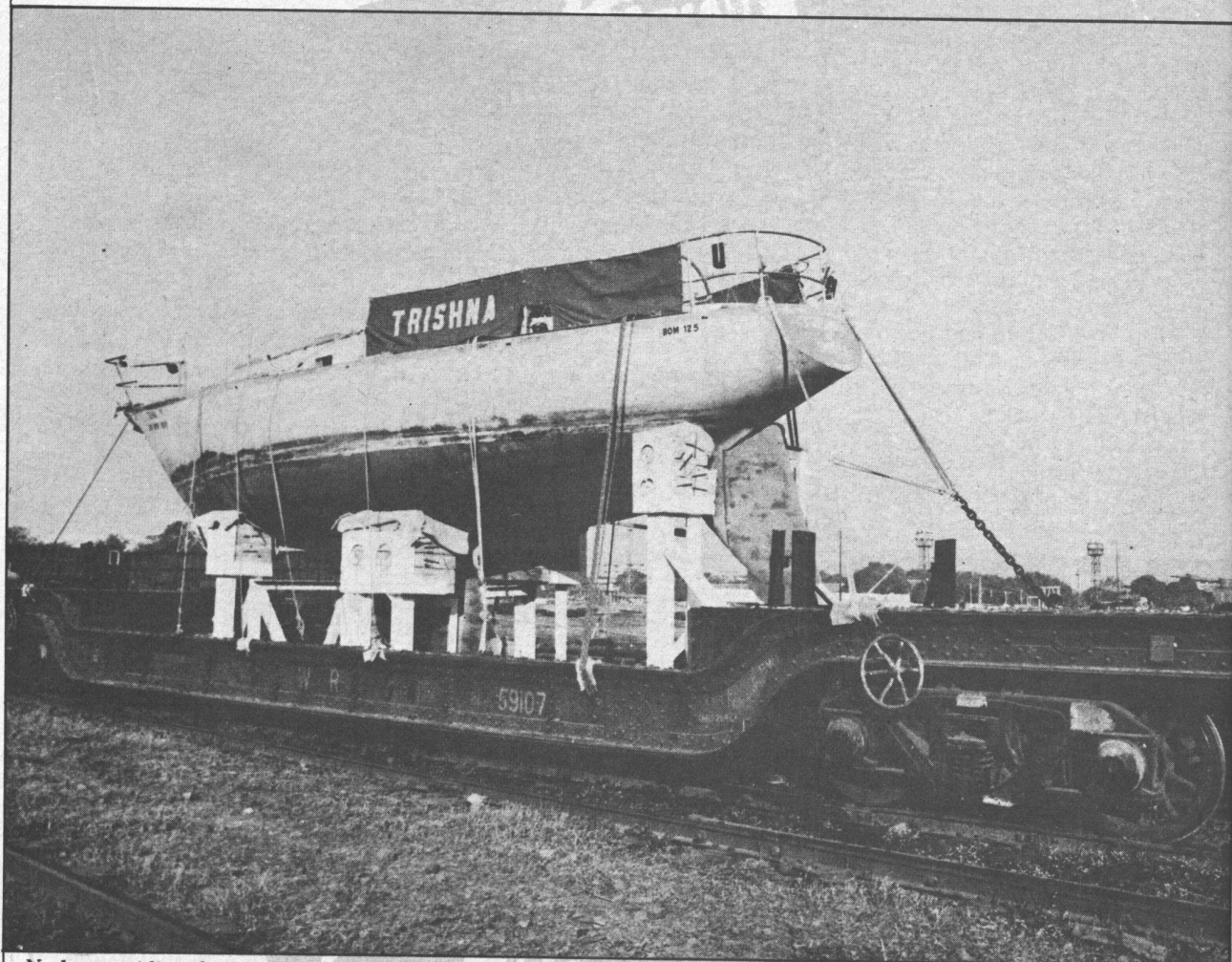
by the speed at which things happened. It happened at the speed at which things must have happened on the boat. When they were without communication and drifting: when they were short of food and water and fuel, Rao kept calm, didn't panic, and organised. This was exactly what he did at this moment.

What Rao had talked of was the voyage. Several things happened before our conversation. I asked him to agree to pose for a photograph in one of the immensely long corridors of the College. He said OK, but when he stood in front of Pradeep's Nikon, he stood to attention, looking towards it with the slightly damaged attention of a bird about to be shot. His arms

were stiff by his sides, his eyes wide, his face frozen. I tried to speak to him to distract him from the camera, which is normal reporting technique. But he would not be distracted. He was doing his duty. He stared down the lens and was still. I later noticed this in all the eight *Trishna* crew members I interviewed. All posed for Pradeep as if posing for passport pictures. What didn't happen was that any of them relaxed in the body, but they relaxed mentally, and the words finally came out in the kind of flood that often raged over the vessel when the waves of many seas swept and thundered around it.

After my interview with Colonel Rao, I was put into the care of Cap-

tain Navin Ahuja, the youngest crew member. Captain Ahuja comes from Delhi. He started his sailing career young, like most of the others. He complained that because of his youth he was put in charge of the dirtiest work on his leg of the trip, which was from the West Indies to New Zealand. When the boat was put into port, he had to clean the hull free of barnacles, algae, and so forth. When it was actually at sea, he had to clean the loos and washbasins. The loo, he recalls, was very small. "When you sat on it, you literally had to hold on to something with both hands if you didn't want to fall off. It was flushed by seawater. You had to operate two handpumps to flush it." He adds

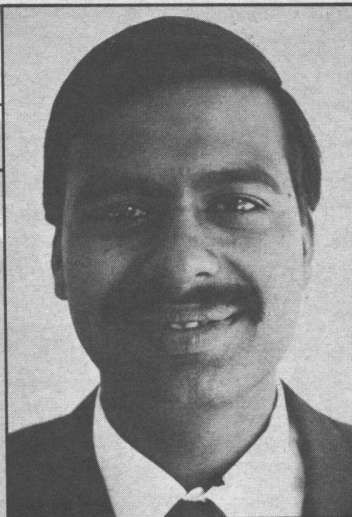


*No longer riding the familiar sea, the Trishna is on its way to the railway station, en route to Delhi and Republic Day.*

loyally that though this was all hard work, there was always Colonel Rao to help him when the going got very hard.

I asked Ahuja why the whole crew consisted of officers. "Because," he said, "the *jawans* haven't the IQ of officers. They haven't the initiative in a crisis." Ahuja is a very nice young man, but this seemed a strange statement. I said that since part of the whole trip was to do with instilling greater discipline and initiative into the people who took part, surely it would have helped to do so in any *jawans* who had been along on it. "Well, if it did," he replied, "we would have *jawans* answering officers back, and we don't want that, do we?" I pointed out that some *jawans* did become officers. "Yes," he said, "that happens," but didn't make any further comments on the topic. He had volunteered for the trip because of the adventure involved, the opportunity to visit new countries, and the sense of achievement that came. "It's not the fame that matters," he said, "but the feeling of what you have done." I forebore to mention that the *Trishna* voyagers were unlikely to become individually famous. It was their feat that would.

**T**HE BOAT ITSELF, before the crew left Bombay, had been taken to Delhi to appear in the Republic Day parade, a feat in itself. It was only with the cooperation of the Navy and the railways that this was possible at all. A cradle had to be built for it, and this was mounted on four steel posts. However, nobody was very sure of the curves and angles in her structure, or their exact measurements, so the cradle was built by guess and by God. Fortunately, it fitted the boat. It had to be lifted into the cradle, transported from there to Victoria Terminus, lifted into the train, and sent to Delhi. There it was to be met by some members of the crew, who would travel from Pune, and then transported to its destination. What would happen after the Republic Day parade was unclear.



## CAPTAIN SHEKHAR

I lived in Dehra Dun and studied in Doon School. Later, I went to the National Defence Academy (NDA) Pune, where I got a lot of sailing practice at the Khadakvasala lake. I also won medals and trophies in sailing.

The members of the *Trishna* crew were given separate departments to manage; I was in charge of food and medicines. We were generally in good health except in cold climates when we were susceptible to coughs and colds. But these were very minor things. And we had stocked enough antibiotics to combat them. We also had a large stock of multi-vitamins and vitamin C which we finally never used. Colonel Rao once had some dental problem but it was effectively cured by a course of antibiotics.

Our food habits depended on many factors — like the time at our disposal or our moods. At sea we lost all concept of time and were constantly on duty for four hours and then off duty for another four hours. It seemed an endless cycle and at times we were in no mood to eat, especially when the sea was rough. At such times we'd only share one tin of canned fruits for dinner. However, when the sea was calm and there wasn't much work to do, we would eat a lot. This may be the reason we all put on weight. Tastes also kept varying. For instance, we had many cartons of chocolates but at times, no one seemed to want them.

In general, we had boiled eggs and juice for breakfast. Lunch consisted mostly of Maggi noodles and sometimes *khichdi* with pickles. For dinner we had rice, dal or *rajma* and potatoes. We did not eat any non-vegetarian food — only fresh fish, when it was available. We kept apples in stock as they lasted a month. Tinned fruits and condensed milk were, of course, very popular.

There have been suggestions that it should be put into a maritime museum in Bombay, but it is also required for the purpose of training new officers who may crew the next round-the-world voyage, scheduled for 1988. It may also make the voyage itself.

The boat, according to its crew, had suffered no real damage on the trip. It had been much buffeted by storms, but the repairs required were minor. "She has lovely lines," said Major A K Singh, who was one of the people who chose and bought her in London and sailed her back to India.

"You see, a good violinist can take a violin in his hands and judge by its lines how well it will play and how much wear and tear it will take. A good sailor can do that with a boat. Even though *Trishna* had two previous owners, and wasn't new, she stood up magnificently to the trip and did all we asked of her." Major Singh, who has grey hair and a black beard, also has a steel leg, plastic dentures, and a restructured jawline, all of which became necessary after a hang gliding accident a few years ago. In spite of all this, he went all the way on *Tri-*

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*shna*. At one point the artificial limb broke. "It was the most terrible feeling, that people depended on me and I was letting them down. Fortunately, I got a new one in Australia — for \$17,000."

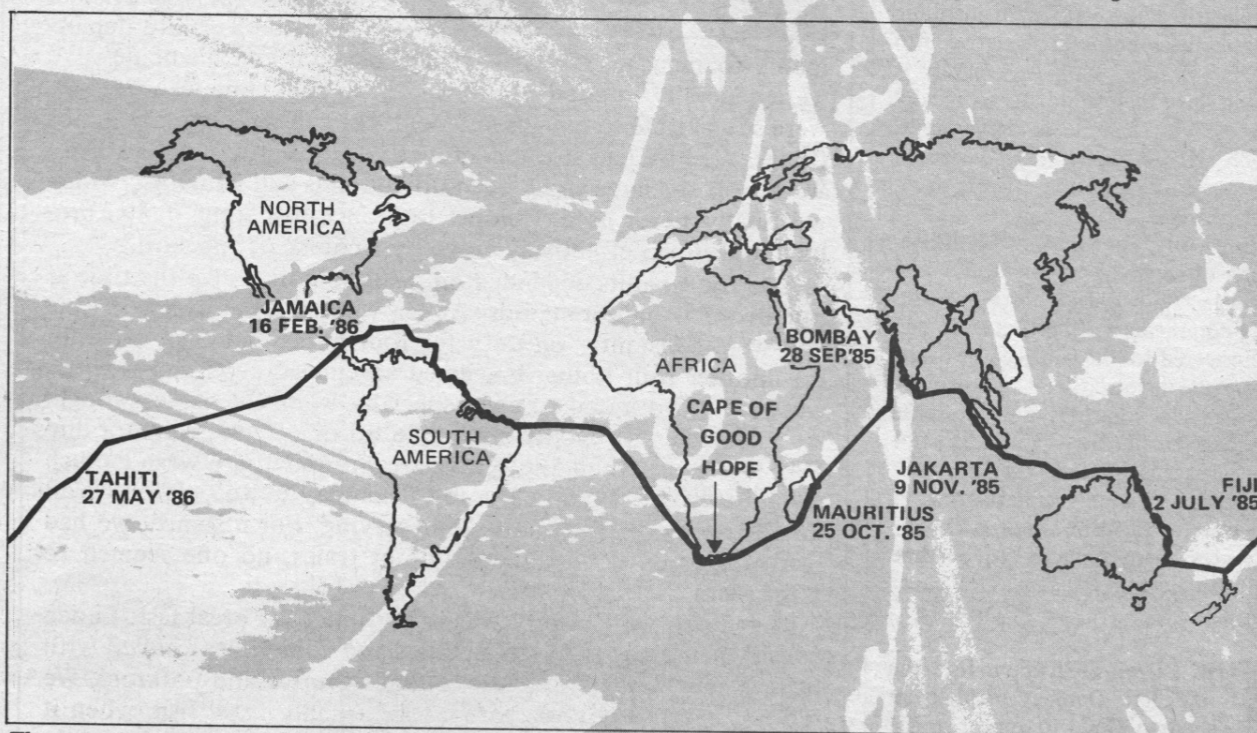
By the afternoon of this long day I had interviewed five of the eight crew members available. Apart from Rao, A K Singh, and Ahuja, I had long sessions with Major A P Singh and

by his deciding he could only go halfway. Most people would think that even halfway would be enough. But Major A P Singh looked slightly disconsolate at not having gone the full distance. I really didn't see why. He had played his part and been there.

Captain Bassi comes of an Army family. He is spry and young, and is one of those in *Trishna's* crew who may accompany the voyage schedul-

had different, but equally taxing, duties. "In one South American port," he added, "I had to send a lot of picture postcards home from our crew. The man at the post office looked at the cards, and put them in three stacks. He charged a different rate for the cards in each stack. I didn't know why. So I asked him.

"The man told me that he was charging for the wordage on the cards.



*The way they went: Bombay — Trinidad — Jamaica — Panama — Cape of Good Hope — New Zealand — Australia — Indonesia — Sri Lanka — Bombay.*

Captain Bassi. The latter Major Singh, had been one of the original crew members chosen in 1978, but for personal reasons he had not made the whole trip. He had, however, travelled halfway, from Bombay to Panama, where the boat stopped for a month for cleaning and repairs, its longest break from the seas. Major Singh had, in a sense, achieved his ambition. He is a tall, thin, rather unworldly looking person, but he has sailed halfway round the world. While Major A K Singh's family problems only started after the trip, Major A P's started before. They were solved, quite simply,

ed for 1988. He sailed from Bombay to Trinidad, and apart from the normal duties on board, looked after the accounts. "In every port," he said, "Captain Shekhar, who was in charge of the food and medicine on the boat, would come to me with a list of what was required. I would give him the money and he would buy what was required. In every port I would have to look after the paperwork involved, get the local currency, make the necessary clearances." This seemed a daunting task, but Captain Bassi, with a cheerful smile said, "I enjoyed it." He added that his colleagues had all

The less wordage, the less the cost. I couldn't believe it!" He laughed his infectious laugh. "But it was all fun. It was all part of the game."

This organisational work did not end with the voyage. In the afternoon, Colonel Rao and I were talking, and Major Bhattacharya and Major A P Singh were there too. What they wanted to discuss with each other were the dates and places of forthcoming functions, before they all went on leave on January 30, what the appropriate dress was for each function, and what they should do about their travel. They were on the waiting list for

the plane from Bombay to Delhi, where they were to rehearse for the Republic Day parade on January 19. It seemed to me absurd that people whose deeds were nationally known should have to be on waiting lists for plane tickets. It seemed to me even more absurd that they should have to fix their tickets by themselves. Some assistance should have been given them, from somebody somewhere. Still, I suppose the assumption was that if they had found their way round the world by themselves, they could find their way from Bombay to Delhi. But though a minor matter, the ticket problem, for national heroes, shouldn't have existed.

The sun burnt over banners, bougainvillea, and hundreds of assembled *jawns* amidst trees on the extensive grounds of the CME. The day was coming to its close. The *Trishna* voyagers, in blazers, ties, and slacks, sat on a platform. Speeches were made. The *jawns* not only applauded loudly, but looked at the returned travellers with respect. Rao, in his speech, said that he could not express all he wanted to convey in ten minutes, also that in Hindi he found it difficult to express himself at all. Some time earlier, he had told me that the crew conversed in what he called 'Army language, that is English mixed with Hindi words'. It seemed a kind of commentary on the linguistic disputes that have lately disturbed the country. Of the crew, all were Hindus except Colonel Chowdhury, who is a Sikh. All, however, come from variegated parts of India, and have in some cases come from different linguistic backgrounds. Captain Bharti comes from Bhagalpur in Bihar, the place of those blindings. Captain Bharti is himself a very gentle young man. He had been in charge of radio transmissions and receptions, also of the maintenance of the riggings and sails. He was one of the four who had been through the entire trip, the others being Colonel Rao, Major A K Singh, and Captain Shekhar. He looked none the worse for his lengthy trip. In fact, he looked in great shape. So did most of the



## CAPTAIN BHARTI

I was born in a small village near Bhagalpur. I studied in the Sainik School in Purulia in Bihar and then did Chemistry Honours from Hindu College, Delhi, where I topped in my first year. At around that time, I got admission in the National Defence Academy,

so I faced a difficult choice. But I decided I preferred a career in the Army. That's when I started sailing. I picked up more sailing, windsurfing also, once I was commissioned into the Corps of Engineers and joined the College of Military Engineering (CME) in Pune.

My initiation into sailing was at the Khadakvasala lake in Pune, then the Mulla-Mutha river near CME. Later I used to sail in Bombay on the open seas. Once, while surfing in the Bombay harbour, I dropped the sail in a slippery patch where some ship had discharged oil. I drifted about two to three miles away from shore, and was finally rescued by a civilian barge. That was my first unpleasant experience at sea.

The plans for this *Trishna* cruise were in the offing for a long time, while I was still training. Then, at one of the regattas in December 1983, we learnt that the project was likely to come through in the next six months or so, and that they wanted some young officers. So Shekhar and I, who were sailing at that time, volunteered. I felt I shouldn't miss this rare opportunity so I tried my best to get into it.

The selections were based on several factors — availability of the officer, his previous commitments, family problems if any, and, most important of all, crew compatibility. You can't live together in a confined space for 18 months without this. The *Trishna* crew knew each other fairly well since we had met at various regattas. There was no specific exam — it was purely a question of interest. My service conditions had to be vetted (I had to get my engineering degree), and they knew I had no major problems at home. In view of all this, though there were several volunteers, I was lucky enough to be selected.

I got married around that time, and initially, I had to lie to my wife, when I went to England for the selection of the boat. I tried to break it to her gradually so that she wouldn't get a shock when she found out I'd be away for three years. Once I got back from England I faced a lot of opposition from her but I was finally able to convince her that such an opportunity would never come my way again. So, she stayed with her parents and did her masters in domestic science, to keep from fretting about our boat on the high seas!

My major responsibilities on board were radio communication, rigging and the sails. We carried two main sails and 14 ty-

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pes of other sails with us. We had sails of a larger and thinner material for lighter wind conditions and thicker, stronger ones for stronger winds. But, on many occasions, we had to exchange sails which got torn due to wind conditions and excessive splashing of waves. On one occasion, while sailing from Fiji to Auckland, we tore about four Genoas and both the main sails. We were forced to replace the main sail with a tri-sail which is not effective in a storm. So, in the case of one emergency we had to repair one of the main sails ourselves, stitching it by hand.

Unfortunately for me, just as we left Colombo on December 29, I went off duty since I was feeling unwell. My temperature rose considerably that night. Though all of us were trained in first aid, (one of us could even give injections) the fever persisted, rising to 105.8°C by January 3. After contacting doctors in Bombay, I was evacuated to a naval ship that had three doctors on board. I was immediately given hydrotherapy — they poured ice-cold water all over my body and my temperature dropped by midnight. Twenty hours later, I was admitted to a hospital in Bombay and recovered in four days. They diagnosed it as viral fever, probably picked up near the Great Nicobar Islands. But I felt really sad that my luck ran out just at the last stage.

We had two radio sets on board — a 25-watt radio and a high frequency radio. The first had a range of 20 nautical miles. This was of great help on many occasions, especially in diverting ships heading towards us. The second set was a 100-watt set installed by engineers of the Bharat Electronics Ltd, Bangalore. This set was also of great help to us. Right from the time we started till the Cape of Good Hope we could transmit a daily progress report direct to India. But in the Cape of Good Hope, the radio set got damaged in a storm and our communications with the base at Bombay were severed for 15 days, till we reached the St Helena Islands. There was panic back home. A telephone call from St Helena relieved a lot of tension and fear for the organising committee members and our families. We replaced our radio set in Panama. Thereafter, we were always in communication with the nearest available port. We also used the set for taking down weather reports, and for emergencies, as it gave a maximum range of about 5,000 nautical miles.

*Trishna* people. The trip seemed to have done them more good than harm. It had put them into excellent mental and physical condition.

People may not realise that though the actual trip around the world took 15 1/2 months, it was preceded by long preparations, by the buying of the boat, and the sailing of it from England to Bombay. Then came more lengthy preparations for the voyage. For roughly three years, the soldiers

turned sailors were utterly absorbed in this project. During this time they were mentally if not always physically, cut off from their homes, their families, and their wives. Their personal lives suffered as a result.

When it came to the final leg, between New Zealand and India, Major Bhattacharya was the organiser, looking after all the things that Captain Bassi had looked after on the first leg, between Bombay and Trini-

dad. The last leg was in many ways the most exacting, at least in terms of administration. The arrangements ahead in India had to be made. When they entered Indian waters and stood off the Mangalore coast, Captain Bharti fell ill of a viral fever. Since he had gone all the way so far, and there had been no previous severe illness on the boat, Colonel Rao (he had been promoted from Major on the trip, and his first child, also called Trishna after the boat, was born during it) was unwilling to put him ashore. Bharti was even more unwilling to go.

In the end, with Captain Shekhar, the medical officer — in the sense that he had had a slightly more extensive training in the skills of Hippocrates than the rest — feeding him pills and wrapping him in sheets soaked with water, his temperature soared to 105.6. Rao then radioed Bombay for advice. The Naval Hospital said that if Bharti didn't have expert and im-





*Rao comes home to be greeted by his Army superiors.*



*Curious and various dignitaries stare down at the Trishna.*

mediate medical help, his situation was critical. They then advised Rao that the INS Ganga, which had three doctors and a hospital ward, was within four hours sailing distance of the boat. Contact was made, and Bhattacharya had to fix various complicated details. Bharti by this time was hardly conscious. "He's a very polite chap," Colonel Rao told me. "In the beginning he used to ask us, 'Water, please.' When he didn't say anything, but simply stretched out his hand to show that he wanted water, I knew his condition must be very serious." Bharti was taken into the ship, and cured. He rejoined *Trishna* after five days' absence, at a small port in Maharashtra, in time for the return.

**T**HE CREW of *Trishna* were mainly somewhat confused about what lies ahead of them. They are all in love with what is called in England 'messing around in small boats', and most are fairly certain that at some time or other they would want to sail once more, though not necessarily over the seas of the world. One person certain of what he will be

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doing is Captain Shekhar, who wants to finish a diploma course and will not be available for prolonged voyages until 1990.

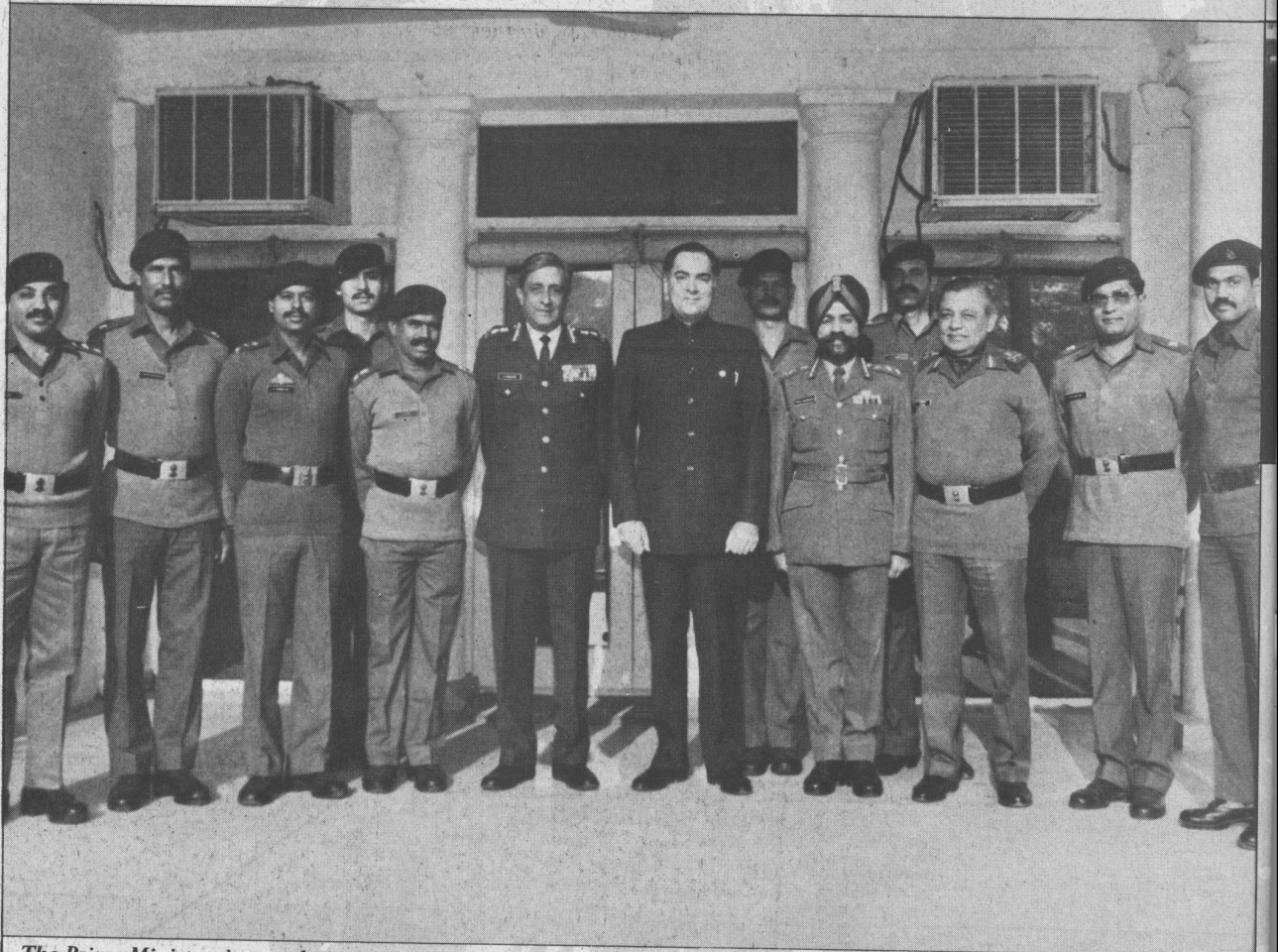
The members of the *Trishna* party have entered my memory and imprinted themselves on it, because it is seldom that one meets good, brave, and charitable men. The feat they have performed will be remembered for a long while. If they are not to exactly be remembered individually in history, everyone who has met them will remember them, not only because of the voyage.

What constitutes a hero? In the course of my life I have met many, who were called that by their nations and sometimes by themselves. There

have been military heroes, those who have dared space, and survived, pilots, mountaineers, and those who have done something to uplift the human spirit. By what means they do it is irrelevant. A great writer like Faulkner, without having performed a single act of physical courage in his life, unless the excess consumption of rye whiskey is heroic, can be a hero. So can a painter like Bacon. A psychologist can be a hero, witness Freud. Einstein, a scientist, was a kind of hero. If they were heroes, it was because they extended the boundaries of knowledge. Not only knowledge of the world, but knowledge of the potential in every person. Because of this, they have the power which every tyrant or

dictator has but which they should never have, the power of changing the minds of people. Perhaps I should say *charging* the minds. The people of the world have been altered by every example placed in front of them.

Hitler appeared. The German people became numb and dumb when he orated. Stalin mumbled on the balconies of the Kremlin. The Russian people, for decades, ceased to speak their minds in their own country. This is the wrong sort of example. The example that should be given is that by ordinary people who show others that they can also make history. By the astronauts. They had nothing spectacular in their minds or bodies,



*The Prime Minister, in parade stance, with the Trishna sailors, now back to being soldiers.*



*The Trishna crew on their triumphant return to Bombay, with General Sundarji and his wife to welcome them (amongst a few thousand others).*



*Women who waited: babies their fathers hadn't seen.*



*Above: Mrs Rao;  
Right: Mrs A K Singh.*

yet they have wandered amidst the planets and walked in the dust of forgotten stars. Joshua Slocum, sailing the world in a sloop, Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic alone in 1927 when aircraft weren't made for these purposes. Amelia Earhart disappearing on another solo flight. St Exupery, attempting yet another lonely flight into some final mystery. And now by these people, our own, who have shown people all over the world what is in their capacity to achieve. You don't have to be gifted, simply human.

So the *Trishna* crew will be remembered. As will the two people on the American plane Voyager, who in nine days, somewhat less than the *Trishna* took, circled the 26,000 miles round the gargantuan girth of the globe, and, as the *Trishna* did, came safely back to whatever place it is in the heart which most people call home.